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**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARD USING
BLOGGING IN UPPER INTERMEDIATE EFL CLASSES**

MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate how students feel about and perceive the use of blogs in language learning. The results of this study are useful for teachers who want to integrate technology into their teaching methods. Using blogs offers the possibility for the students to interact using foreign language in an out-of-class environment.

Four main research questions were formulated about this topic:

1. What are students' perceptions of using blogs in EFL learning?
2. What are students' attitudes towards using blogs in EFL learning?
3. What are students' perceptions of the teacher's role and feedback?
4. What are students' perceptions of peer feedback?

The questions have been derived from previous research (Noytim, 2010; Foroutan, Noordin, Hamazah, 2013; Mompean 2010; Hasemil, Najafi 2011)

Blogging as a method of teaching was tested and the students were later interviewed. Seven gymnasium level EFL students, who had difficulties with their English studies where the sample of this study. The goal of the blog was to make them communicate in English in an out-of-class environment. The students had to complete 3 open-topic blogging tasks and also give each other feedback via comments. They were later interviewed and the results were transcribed and categorised.

This Master's thesis is divided into six main sections. The introduction gives an overview of the importance of technology in education and the notion of blogging as a method of teaching. The first chapter in which blogging in EFL teaching is discussed is divided into five separate topics: the role of writing in EFL classes, writing in the Estonian curriculum, using blogging to teach writing, students' perceptions and attitudes towards blogging according to prior research, and the teacher's role. In the second and third chapters the methodology and results of the study conducted are reviewed and these sections are followed by a discussion and conclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's society technology is rapidly advancing and playing an enormous role in people's everyday lives. Thus, it is important to start thinking of different ways to integrate the use of technology into education. Technology has already found its way into everyday school life via the use of study systems such as E-School and Studium. However, there are still several more possibilities to tie education and technology. Research has been done in this field but there are still many areas that need further testing and discussion in order to find the best and most effective uses for technology.

Today's students grow up using technology the moment they start exploring the world independently. As Nesbit and Winne (2008: 173) point out, "When all learners are networked all the time, the implicitly understood models of teaching and learning will be unpredictably and irrevocably altered." In order to make sense of these alterations and use them for the benefit of education, we should look more specifically at the changes that have taken place in the use of technology.

Warlick (2007) indicates that the information environment in which our students spend much of their time is substantially different from the one that we know and, thus, has an effect on not just how they seek entertainment but also how they interact with each other and learn. The four things that he finds different in information nowadays are that it is more networked, digital, overwhelming, and exists outside of containers. These characteristics should be taken into account in today's education. Modern teaching methods could take advantage of how students find information as well as of their eagerness to share it online. This might also include teaching them about reliable and unreliable sources and the dangers of technology. Their willingness to communicate over the internet could be used to enhance their writing and communicative skills and at the same time teach them about proper online behaviour and values.

Using technology in education should be well thought through and rationalised. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) argue that learning has transformed over the past thirty years. They mention the internet changing the way children and young people gather and process information in all aspects of their lives. Children that have grown up in an information and technology led environment need new kinds of approaches in their education. Teachers have to find ways to make students relate to what they are learning and make them communicate. Engaging students deeply in meaningful ways and providing them with active learning opportunities and realistic environments will give them the most powerful learning experience and nurture their motivation (Brooks, Nolan and Gallagher, 2001). Using computer assisted teaching methods is not just a way to make learning more interesting and compelling to students. Computer assisted learning is also a way to teach them important skills and knowledge about the use, benefits and dangers of technology.

One of the main indicators that technology influences education is that it has found its way into the National Curriculum. In the Estonian National Curriculum of the Gymnasium level, competences have been discussed in paragraph four. Among the eight general competences which should be developed in students, the eighth is digital competence. Digital competence means that students should be taught the ability to use developing technology in order to manage learning, being a citizen and communicating in a rapidly changing society. They should also be able find and store information using digital technology and evaluate its relevance and reliability. Students should be able to take part in digital content creation, and solve problems using digital equipment, have the opportunity to work together, communicate in a digital environment and be aware of the dangers of it. Students should know how to protect their personal data and digital identity and follow morals and values in a digital environment the same way they do in everyday life. Moreover, in Appendix 2 of the curriculum, which is about foreign language teaching, it is

said that students should be guided towards understanding the importance of natural sciences and technology and their influence on everyday life, nature and society.

It is evident that teaching students about technology is an important part of education. However, it is also obvious that technological competences are discussed rather vaguely and generally in the curriculum document. Developing competence related skills is seen as a task for teachers of all subjects. In the case of technology it means not just in the students Information and Communication Technology studies. A working teacher, however, can get confused about how to integrate their subject and technology in order to get the results which are in the curriculum. At the moment, there is a substantial amount of information about what should be the outcomes of fostering competences but not many tested and useful possibilities to work for these outcomes have been offered or researched. This is an area which needs to be well thought through in order for the use of technology to be effective. According to Palfrey and Gasser (2008: 247), “The most important thing that schools can do is not to use technology in the curriculum more but use it more effectively.” They emphasise that technology in teaching should not be forced because it is new and perceived as cool. Their perspective is that it is important to experiment with ways to include technology in order to use it effectively where it ought to be used. From this emerges the question of what possibilities English teachers have to integrate technology in meaningful and effective ways?

The teacher could take advantage of the fact that students communicate through the internet every day. Crystal 2004 states that computer mediated communication is substantially different from real-life conversations as there is a sense of delay between the stimulus and response. Moreover, according to him the idea of a bulletin board type of communication is even more complex. Despite its complexity, this type of communication is used by young people every day. A good example of this is social media which gives

them the opportunity to quickly reach a large audience. The appeal of an audience could also be used for educational purposes. The teacher could choose a form of computer mediated communication in order to practise a specific skill or a set of skills. Blogging might be one such option as it is very interactive and offers extensive possibilities to be adapted in order to coincide with the expected learning outcomes.

The word *blog* comes from the words Web and log (Rettberg, 2008). *Weblogs* or *blogs* have been defined differently by different authors. Rebecca Blood (2000) suggests that the term 'weblog' was first used in 1997 by an internet enthusiast Jorn Barger who renamed his 'website' (Robot Wisdom), a 'weblog'. This website was also the basis of one of the most important qualities that describes blogs - the fact that they are updated frequently. Blood (2000) also mentions that another important characteristic of a blog is the way information is added - new entries are added at the top. The reverse chronological order is a distinguishing feature for blogs (Tremayne, 2012; Ward, 2004).

The fact that blogs have got immensely popular very quickly is mostly due to the possibilities that blogs offer and the easiness of their use (Matheson, 2004). Ward (2004) emphasises that blogs offer free online publishing opportunities for anyone who cares to write and read. Moreover, weblogs are usually motivated by the need for self-expression. These characteristics make it perfect for using as a teaching method. Blogs are easy to use and at the same time they offer the opportunity for self-expression through discussing and reading about topics of interest.

Blogging has been welcomed rather warmly into modern education. Clarke (2008) claims that blogs can become tools for interaction, feedback and reflection because they enable students to keep reflective diaries, and share them. They can also promote student interaction via commenting. In compliance with this, Vurdien (2011) suggests that blogs are a new horizon in the field of language teaching and learning because of their interactive

nature which can motivate students to read in a different language and get feedback from an audience. What is more, blogs can be used by the teacher to ask students questions, exchange views with them and encourage them to discuss different issues as well as express their concerns.

Reflecting on learning and communicating are key factors of blogging. Since entries are in date order, they offer students a chance to reminisce and reflect about their learning process and draw conclusions about what has been learned. (Clarke, 2008)

Clarke (2008: 44) lists different ways blogs can be used in learning:

- Personal learning diary
- Showcase of work produced as a part of the course
- Resources that you have located on the internet which have helped you and may help your colleagues.
- Your response to topical items relevant to the course
- Reflections on course materials and textbooks.

From Clarke's examples, the benefits of the interactiveness of blogs are clearly visible. This, in turn, enables it to be used for student discussions. Regardless of the delivery format, discussions are an essential part of learning, enabling students to question and process what they are acquiring (Brooks, Nolan and Gallagher, 2001). Discussions also offer the possibility to exchange ideas and perspectives about the information that they have received during their studies.

Brooks, Nolan and Gallagher (2001) also point out that the Web is the best place for passive learners because there is reading without being forced to immediately demonstrate what you have learned. This idea is also supported by Crystal (2004) who claims that online communication is better for students who tend to be silent in an open class. According to Crystal it can be a way for them to participate equally to more active students in the class.

In Estonia, there has been very little research about blogging in education. K. Beljajev (2006) conducted a study focusing on students' preferences on the internet. Her study

showed that out of a sample of 948 students, 25% use weblogs and 23% use a personal home page. Taking into account the fact that the study was conducted 9 years ago and also the rapid development of technology, it can be estimated that this number is far greater nowadays. In 2011, K. Luik executed a study for her master's thesis, which is about class teachers using blogs in order to communicate with parents. In her study, she found that blogging does make communicating between parents and the teacher easier; however, the success depends on active participation by both parents and the teacher. Both of these studies show that blogging has some potential to be used in Estonian education; yet neither of them focuses on the teaching possibilities of blogging. More concrete and teaching related research needs to be done in this field. With this thesis, I hope to add an important first insight to the value of blogging in English language teaching in Estonia.

The aim of this study is to investigate how students feel about and perceive the use of blogs in language learning. This information is useful for teachers in further enhancing and varying their methods of teaching as well as offering students a modern and different way of learning and communicating.

Four main research questions were formulated about this topic:

1. What are students' perceptions of using blogs in EFL learning?
2. What are students' attitudes towards using blogs in EFL learning?
3. What are students' perceptions of the teacher's role and feedback?
4. What are e students' perceptions of peer feedback?

The first two questions have previously been researched by Noytim (2010) and Foroutan, Noordin, Hamazah (2013). These questions will help understand how students see the use of blogs and will reveal interesting opinions and emotions about the students' own experience with blogging.

The teachers' role and feedback have previously been discussed in a study conducted by Mompean (2010), who researched the necessary pedagogical interventions in order for blogs to be an efficient means of learning. Hasemil and Najafi (2011) also focused on the teachers' role in using blogs as an object of learning language.

In order to answer the research questions, blogging as a method of teaching was tested and the students were later interviewed. Seven gymnasium level EFL students of whom three are girls and four are boys were the sample of this study. The students have had difficulties with learning English and most of them sense that they are not very good at it. This group with their insecurities about their language skill and difficulties with communicating in English was the inspiration for testing this method. Because of this, the goal of the blog was to create an out-of-school environment where the students have the courage to use English, widen their vocabulary, and strengthen their grammar.

In order include more varied aspects of this topic my experience about being an administrator for the students' blog and giving feedback will also be reviewed in the results of this thesis.

1. USING BLOGGING IN EFL

In the past decade, the topic of blogging in education has been researched quite extensively. Blogging has been connected to writing skills and learner autonomy. A sizable amount of the research about the educational use of blogs has been connected to the students' view of it and what they experienced through the process. Nevertheless, there are still aspects that need further research. Moreover, in Estonia the topic of blogging in EFL studies has not yet received significant attention.

This chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, the role of writing in EFL classes is discussed, giving an overview of the importance of writing as well as different aspects of it. In the second section, writing skills according to the National Curriculum of the gymnasium level are discussed. In the third section, blogging as a possible method for teaching writing is reviewed. Previous research about students' perceptions and attitudes towards using blogging in EFL classes has been presented in the fourth section. The final part of this chapter focuses on the teachers' role.

1.1 The role of writing in EFL

Writing is an important part of learning and teaching a language. In the 1980s, writing first emerged as a distinctive area of teaching EFL (Hyland, 2003). Through writing, the errors and mistakes in a person's language use are visible and offer the opportunity to be analysed and corrected. Additionally, writing offers learners the possibility to plan their work and use supportive materials. (Hausenberg, Krall, ND)

Hyland (2003) considers writing to be a complex skill, which is socially and culturally influenced. Writing cannot be simplified to a set of cognitive or technical abilities or a system of rules, because it is personal and individual as well as social and interactional in nature. In order to teach such a complex skill, teachers have to consider what aspects of

writing they want to focus on. Hyland (2003: 2) lists seven main foci around which teaching writing could be organised:

- language structure,
- text function,
- themes or topics,
- creative expression,
- composing processes,
- content,
- genre and context writing.

It is not common to take only one of these and follow it. Instead, teachers choose a combination and try to implement various methods to develop different skills. The foci on the list vary by what is considered important in the teaching process. While structure and function related foci use a set and specific format with emphasis on form, with theme and creative expression foci a more student-independent and free format of writing is preferred. Furthermore, with content focused teaching, the topics of writing are usually of interest to students and in genre and context oriented writing the focus is on the purpose of the text and communicating with the reader (Hyland, 2003).

In each of the previously discussed foci the teacher should take into account students' capabilities in order to find writing tasks which are sufficiently difficult, yet not overwhelming. The teacher has to adjust his/her methods to the needs of the students and consider which particular skills need developing.

1.2 Writing in the Estonian National Curricula for Foreign Languages

English teachers have to be aware of what level their students are and what they need to practise in order to advance to the next level. For Estonian teachers of English, the overview of skills connected to the internationally recognised levels of language proficiency are discussed in the National Curriculum of the Gymnasium level and its additional materials. In the foreign language guide for teachers of English

(*valdkonnaraamat*) on the gymnasium level, the skills required for each language level are discussed.

According to this, a B1 level student is capable of producing simple texts on familiar topics but at B2 level a student has to be able to write a coherent and logical text on different topics. This also coincides with Appendix 2 of the National Curriculum of the gymnasium level where the necessary skills for listening, reading, speaking, writing and grammar are listed for level A1.1 to level C1.

According to this list, the kinds of texts that students have to be able to write get increasingly complex with each level. A student at level B1.1 should be able to produce simple narrative texts or express his/her own opinion and thoughts using a limited amount of linking devices. In contrast, a student at B1.2 level has to be able to write a summary and a short essay expressing his/her opinion. At levels B2.1 and B2.2, the texts get more elaborate as the students have to be able to write on general topics, differentiate between informal and formal style (B2.1) and write logical and coherent essays and reports (B2.2).

There are also examples of different types of texts given in Appendix 2, among which making a blog entry is listed as a task which students at B1.1 should be able to fulfil. In the same document, blogging is also mentioned on page 10 in Section 2.2.2. There it is claimed that in the teaching of a foreign language the emphasis is on interactive learning and teaching methods. Thus, it is evident that in the National Curriculum blogging is seen as one of the possible ways to teach writing.

1.3 Using blogging to teach writing skills

The use of blogs to teach writing skills has been discussed by various authors and has had a lot of positive reactions. Ward (2004) has suggested that weblogs can fulfil many of the needs identified for the effective teaching of writing because they are authentically communicative, process driven, peer reviewed, provide a dis-inhibiting context and offer a

completely new form with creative potential. He also emphasises that blogs provide a genuine audience for students. Thus, it can be said that a positive side of blogs is the fact that not just the teacher reads students' work but other members of the blog read it as well. This offers students the possibility to see how peers react to their writings and also the teacher to use peer feedback and encourage communication. Moreover, Warlick (2007), who has studied blogging as a method for developing literacy, claims that it is about reading, thinking and writing. He highlights that it gives the students opportunity to learn through communication. In this sense we can say that blogging involves and evolves many different skills. Surely, something with positive effects on so many aspects also has incredible potential to be an enormous asset to language teaching methodology.

Nevertheless, it is also quite clear that in the case of blogging we are dealing with informal writing. Crystal (2004) states that the internet is promoting the use of informal writing style. He suggests that this notion needs to be rethought as the internet should be usable both for formal as well as informal purposes. One possibility of that would be to find well thought through methods of turning everyday internet use into a structured learning tool. Informal writing is used mostly in lower language levels and students start distinguishing between informal and formal language and using them depending on the situation at level B2 (see p. 13). If the writing style of a blog is informal but the students of a higher language level than B1 have to practise formal writing style, can blogs be beneficial for their writing skills?

One way to rationalise computer based informal writing for educational purposes is that this is actually the type of communication students will use in the future. As Johnson (2004) remarks, after graduating from the university, most writing will be done on a word processor of some sort and, thus, writing classes should be set in a more realistic environment. This does not much differ from what happens when a student graduates the

twelfth grade. Once a student starts university or vocational school they will soon see that most papers are written on the computer and presented through the internet. However, this is more connected to digital competence (see p. 5) than teaching specific writing skills.

On the matter of formal and informal writing, research has shown interesting results. Sun (2010), who tested the effects of blogging on developing writing, specifically used tasks which were informal. In this study, the blogs were purposefully made personal and informal in order to give students an opportunity for out-of-class writing with a free format. No formal instruction and expectations were given, allowing students to write their blog freely in the way that they wanted it to be. This research showed that students did use less complex sentence structures; however, the students' overall writing improved significantly in the field of mechanics and organisation. Sun (2010: 337) concludes from this: "The results of the present study indicate that blogs could constitute an effective task-based environment that prompts authentic, purposeful language use, and enhances writing proficiency in foreign languages." Considering this, it can be concluded that it does not particularly matter that the writing in blogs is informal rather than formal. What is more important is the fact that it gives students the possibility to express themselves through writing and, thus, has a positive effect on their writing skills. It is useful to offer students, who mostly practise formal writing, a medium in which they can test out their skills. An informal context can give them more courage to use the skills they have already acquired and also practise structuring their thoughts. Even an informal blogging task can demand a fair amount of analytical capability. The content of the blog depends on how the teacher poses the tasks which the students have to fulfil. Moreover, blogs also give the teacher the freedom to establish rules for the blog in which they can determine the style of the writing.

1.4 Students' attitudes and perceptions about using blogs

Using blogging in EFL classes has been researched focusing on different skills and methods. The topics that have raised the most interest are connected to students' attitudes and perceptions towards using blogs. Of course, when analysing a method of teaching the reactions and opinions of students themselves are the best way to start.

Noytim (2010) claims that Weblogs are a powerful tool for English language learning, particularly for developing reading and writing skills. He conducted a study where 14 students undertaking the course: Reading and Writing for Academic Purposes II did blog-based exercises. Later in the study the students' perceptions and attitudes were investigated via short questionnaires and interviews. Noytim's study concluded that, overall, students were positive about using blogging in the course and they believed it aided them in their English studies – in developing their reading and writing skills. However, some students noted that writing on the topics given by the teacher might be uninteresting, less motivating and difficult. Still, the opinions varied, because some students preferred the teacher given topics as they had clear guidelines and directions as well as teacher evaluation.

Foroutan, Noordin, and Hamazah (2013) examined the effect of using Weblog on students' writing autonomy. They found that blogs can be a tool to promote autonomy in learners. The students enjoyed the process of publishing their writings and exchanging their experience in the weblog. The students in this study said that they enjoyed experiencing unlimited time and place, more independence and freedom in publishing and exchanging comments, features which are not found in conventional modes of teaching and learning. (Foroutan, Noordin and Hamazah, 2013)

Students' perceptions about peer feedback have also been a topic of interest. These have previously been studied by Chen (2012), Vurdien (2011), and Grami (2012). All of the previously mentioned studies showed positive attitudes towards peer feedback. The

students enjoy commenting and receiving comments as it is online communication with their peers.

Overall, research shows that students enjoy blog based learning and perceive it as something different from usual classroom learning. Being able to communicate with peers is seen as a positive experience and a chance to learn. Students consider it useful and helpful for developing their language skills.

1.5 The teacher's role

In a blog meant for learning, the teacher is the administrator. There is an overwhelming number of possibilities of how to organise work. The first thing which a teacher should decide upon is the type of blog that is going to be used.

Campbell (2003) lists three types of blogs for ESL use: the tutor blog, the learner blog, and the class blog. In his classification the teacher's or tutor's role is the biggest in the tutor type of blog which is used to provide information, materials and webpages, but also encourages communication through commenting. On the other hand, the learner blog is mostly run by the learners and is best suited for learning and writing classes. In this case, it is even suggested that tutors can post selected topics of interest for the students. A class blog is a type of blog which can already quite often be seen in Estonian classes, for example a blog similar to what Luik (2011) used in her research (see p. 9). However, Campbell's idea of a class blog could also be used as a teaching method for project-based learning.

The teacher's role in a blog can, therefore, vary according to the type of blog they choose to use. This is a decision which teachers should make by analysing the specific group they are working with and determining what sort of blog would be most useful for these particular students. When the teacher is aware of the needs and capabilities of students, (s)he can establish what type of tasks students have to complete in the blog.

The next element the teacher should resolve is feedback to students. Hasemil and Najafi (2011) claim that a teacher should actively give feedback to students' writing in a blog and correct their mistakes in order for the time spent online not to be a waste. Opposing that, Mompean (2010), who studied the necessary pedagogical interventions needed in a blog, found students' opinions about the feedback which they received from the teacher to be varied. Some of the students found it motivating, others did not. Thus, the topic of the teachers' role in blogging needs more research (Mompean 2010). The research done thus far has focused more on students' perspectives and the teacher's role has not been investigated much.

To conclude, Writing is an important part of EFL. Formal and informal writing have been described in the National Curriculum and are a part of EFL studies. Although the nature of blogging is informal it can still have a positive effect on the mechanics and organisation of how the students complete writing tasks. Moreover, blogs offer the teacher the opportunity to analyse his/her group and considering that decide upon the type of the blog and the assignments. However, what kind of a role the teacher should have within the blog in order for it to be the most efficient is still vague.

2. A STUDY OF THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARD USING BLOGGING IN UPPER INTERMEDIATE EFL CLASSES

The second chapter gives an overview of the study conducted in the 11th form of one of the Estonian upper-secondary schools with the aim of determining the students' perceptions of and attitudes towards blogging. This chapter consists of four sections which describe the methodology, sample, measurement and procedure of the study.

2.1 Methodology

As the aim of the study was to investigate how students feel about and perceive the use of blogs in EFL classes, I tested the method of blogging on seven EFL students. The students had to complete three blogging assignments consisting of uploading three blog posts and commenting on each other's postings. The students were later individually interviewed about their experience.

According to Clarke (2008), in the constructivist learning theory, students learn most by doing and learners need to discover, explore and try out new ideas. Therefore, it is essential for learners to make their own judgements of what they are experiencing. This is also consistent with Flick's (2004: 9: 11) overview of social constructivism where he states that "Knowledge is constructed by learners" and "Knowledge is experience based ". Of this, I understand that the best way to research a method of teaching is to study the constructions of learners themselves. They first have to experience the method and then try to describe their perceptions of it. Considering this, the most useful way to test a method of teaching is to try it out with students and find out their perceptions about what they experienced.

2.2 Sample

Seven gymnasium level EFL students of whom three are girls and four are boys were the sample of this study. They are in the same 11th-grade group and have four lessons

of English each week. The reason that these students are in one group is that they have had difficulties with learning English and most of them consider themselves not very good at it. This group was the inspiration for testing the method of blogging.

2.2 Measurement

After the students had completed their blogging tasks, I conducted seven semi-open individual interviews (see Appendix 1 for the questions) with them. Before the interviews, I prepared 25 questions. At the beginning of the interview, I briefly explained what the main topic of my thesis is. During the interview, I added or removed questions and changed their order if necessary for the conversation to flow more naturally. With the approval of the students, the interviews were also recorded so that transcribing them later would be easier. The interviews were in Estonian and about 25-30 minutes long.

2.3 Procedure

During one half-term of EFL studies the seven students had to take part in blogging exercises. For this I created a blog where I added the students as authors. I gave the students three (See Appendix 2 for the tasks) assignments, which were semi-open topic in order for the students to write freely and the opportunity to choose what they want to write about. In order to give the students some motivation they received points for their uploads and comments. For the points the students got a grade. The grade they received depended on the groups' average score. In order to later be able to ask them about the teacher's role in the blog I was an active member of the blog during the first two tasks – I uploaded example posts and commented on each of their postings. During the last task I remained passive and did not add anything to the blogs entries which they posted.

The goal of this blog was to create an out-of school environment where the students have enough courage to use English despite their level of language skill. My hope was that this will also widen their vocabulary and strengthen their grammar.

The assignments were semi-open topics; they presented a student with a general area of what to write about, but the content itself was for the students to decide. The aim of the assignments was for them to be able to write about simple everyday topics which they could relate to such as travelling, hobbies, and interests. I also emphasised that they should design their posts and add pictures and/or videos to illustrate them so as to add more possibilities to be creative and also make it more fun.

After each assignment, I made a brief overview for the students about the statistics of the blog entries. This included how many comments they had got for their post as well as how many comments they had written on the others' posts, what the average length (word count) of the posts and comments was. When all the assignments were done, I made a separate document for each of the students, where I copied all of their posts and comments and corrected mistakes and gave them to the students. I also made some general notes about what the students are good at and what they should pay more attention to.

When all of the previous was done, I conducted seven individual interviews, which were also recorded. The interviews were semi-structured. I had printed out the questions which I wanted to ask the students; however, I changed the order of the questions and added or skipped questions where I deemed it necessary in order to keep the flow of the conversation natural. In order to get a good overview of their thoughts I did not stop the interviewees even if they deviated slightly from the question I had asked. If the interviewee did not know how to answer a question, I tried to rephrase it and/or connect it to another question. I transcribed, coded and categorized the interviews. During the coding, I focused on the answers that the interviewees had given and used the repetitive topics in their

answers as the main categories. As the interviews were conducted in Estonian, I translated the examples used in the thesis into English.

In the process of coding and categorising the following four categories emerged:

- The first reactions to this method;
- The procedure of making blog entries and the gain from it according to the students;
- How the students felt about feedback and the teacher's role;
- How the students feel the blogs could be improved.

In the final part of the results and analysis I will also add my own perceptions about the process of using blogs for English language learning.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The third chapter presents and reviews the results of the study discussed in the previous chapter. It consists of two main sections. In the first section, the development of the students' blog entries is discussed. The second section is divided into five sub-sections. In four of the five sections, the results of the interviews are analysed, followed by my own perceptions of the blogging experience. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings.

3.1 The development of the blog entries

Throughout the process, there were visible changes in the students' blogs. There were changes in the word count and construction of the blog posts as well as changes in the comments.

In the first post, it was visible that the students relied very much on the illustrations. Some of the students added up to 13 pictures to their blog entry, which seemed too much. The amount of picture material got fewer and more topic related with their blog entries and in the last entry the maximum number of pictures added was three.

The length of the posts was not specified and because of this the posts varied in length. The word counts of the students posts range between 85 (the shortest post) and 204 (the longest post). The longest post was under the second topic which was about the students' personal interests. Still the organisation of the second and the last posts was better in most cases, as the content and phrasing of the posts were thought through better. This became evident when I corrected the students' posts. In the second and third tasks, more complex structures were attempted and sometimes without mistakes.

The uploading and commenting became more frequent. With the first task, only two posts were uploaded before the deadline and all of the comments (except the comments by

me) were given within a span of two weeks. On the second and third posts, most of the students uploaded and already commented before the actual deadline.

The most common mistakes that the students made in their posts were related to sentence structure and tense forms as well as the use of articles and prepositions. However there were very few spelling mistakes.

The number of comments depended on the topic which the students were given. For example, the students commented on the second task the most as it was about their personal interests. The comments in the second task were mostly of the question-answer type where the uploader was asked specifying questions and had to answer.

Overall, the largest number of comments one blog entry got was 18 (the topic was music) and the least was 3 (the topic was travelling). The comments were not very long (1-4 sentences at most) and there were even a few comments with only a word as a reply to an answered question (for example, “cool”). When comparing the comments of the second assignment to the third, there were fewer comments on the last assignment, but they were more elaborate as the students tried to explain their opinions more.

3.2 The results of the interviews

In order to ensure anonymity, the interviewees have been named S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, and S7. Comparing the boys’ answers to the answers given by the girls there were no significant differences. Because of this the gender of the interviewees has not been specified in the results. The examples of the answers given by the students have been written in italics. The following symbols have been used:

/.../ text has been shortened

... the interviewee has made a noticeable pause

(,) a short pause

(.) end of sentences estimated by the interviewer

[] interviewers note specifying something that has been said or describing behaviour.

3.2.1 The first reactions to this method

I asked the students about what their first reaction was when I told them that we were going to use blogs as a method for learning. Most of the students admitted they were confused at first. They had doubts about whether they could manage and what they would have to write about. They worried that they would make too many mistakes and that their writing would be unintelligible for the teacher and for the others.

S6: [her first thought] *I won't manage(.) like I was startled at first and I thought that I will surely not manage ... but when we started doing it [the assignments] it was quite interesting(.)*

S2: *I thought how is this going to work and turn out to be(.) how will we do it(.) it seemed suspicious at first to accomplish(.) /.../ I thought the grading will be very strict and I thought I will not do anything right(.) because my English is not very good(.) ...[starts laughing] and I also thought you [the teacher] would have cramps when you see how many mistakes I make(.)*

S3: *At first I was like what (,) we're going to have a blog in English(.) how is this going to work(.) /.../ I was afraid that everything is wrong and I will do everything wrong (.)*

One of the students had previous experience with blogging and because of that he was not worried about the assignments. Nevertheless, he admitted that using a computer is a problem.

S7: *I didn't feel anything special because I had done something similar before (.) ... Well I have zero computer skills (,) so I thought about how it would go this time (.) Luckily I didn't have any problems (.)*

3.2.2 The procedure of making blog entries and the gain from it according to the students

Students used different tactics to tackle the assignments given to them. Some students used rough drafts either on paper or in a separate file; others typed their text immediately on the blog webpage. All of them said that they used internet translation websites to help them with vocabulary and/or sentence structure.

S6: */.../ at first I made myself an ... like a rough draft on a piece of paper and then I thought of how to word it and then I also used the internet to word it better [laughs] then I read it through and typed it(.) /.../ It [blogging] is useful because you learn certain (,) well I don't know if they're expressions (,) but like words that you have already used and you find it easy to use them again (,) when you need to(.)*

S4: Hmm ... At first I got an assignment, then I started thinking ... in Estonian first (,) on a piece of paper (,) about what I would talk about. Not like the whole story (,) but just like the main points (,) what to talk about (,) Then I tried to translate it into English and make it into a story ... I made a document on my computer first and then I put it there [on the webpage] and added pictures (.)

S7: Well when I got the assignment I thought of how to do it (,) Because the topic was rather broad (,) then I thought to myself what I should do next (,) Of course I used the help of google translate (,) because my English is not the best (,) so just to be sure I checked my sentences (,) /.../ I wrote it immediately onto the post upload window (.)

S1: [I]just went home and started writing what came to mind(,) later I read it through once and if it seemed to be OK I clicked „post“ and that was it(.)

Whether they used rough drafts or not, all of the students said that they completed the assignment in one go. As S4 in the previous examples said, some of the students wrote the blog entry in Estonian first and then translated it into English. This was most common with the first task, which seemed to be the most difficult for the students. The later tasks seemed to become easier for the students.

S5: /.../ Well (,) with sentence structure I like thought it through in Estonian to see how I would say it and then /.../ [used it in her blog]

When the students were asked about what they thought they had gained from this experience, they usually described it through their work process. They sensed that blogging helped them with vocabulary and reading the most. They gained from the experience of being in an English language environment and got accustomed to writing in English the more they posted on the blog. They could read the posts uploaded by the others and compare their own as well as ask questions and discuss. Seeing the others' writings made them want to write longer and better in order for the others to ask them more questions.

S2: /.../ there weren't very complicated words [in other's blogs](,) so you could basically understand when you read other's (,) you could understand what they meant(.)

S1: You read other's posts and /.../ the more you are in that environment (,) the quicker you will learn the language ... and for example there you read all of the posts. /.../ It helped my vocabulary a lot(,) I learned a lot of new words (,) because if you read other's blogs and see words you don't understand(,) look them up in some sort of dictionary and are a little bit smarter after(,)/.../ I didn't pay a lot of attention to grammar(,) because I'm not very good at it [laughs] ... but I think it helps vocabulary and sentence structure because your sentences become longer than you are used to(,) the more you upload to a blog (,) the more you are able to write ... like

longer texts and such ... well you manage better ...[loses thought for a moment] anyway (,) it helped my vocabulary a lot and I learned new words(.)

Being able to read what the others have written seemed to be very helpful and inspirational for the students. They saw that it helped their grammar and sentence structure and a few of the students admitted noticing the others' mistakes and trying to avoid making similar ones. They learned from the others' examples almost as much as they learned from their own experience. When they read the posts which were uploaded, they had to really focus on what was meant in order to make good and appropriate comments.

S3: I saw some grammar mistakes [in other's posts] (,) but it helped my sentence structure when I saw how other's had written (,) /.../ It helps your English [grammar] a lot (,) because firstly you see how others write in English and you see their sentence structure and it helps a lot(.) It's like watching movies with English subtitles (,) where you can see the sentence structure and understand it(.)

S2: You can see if it [other's posts] are logical or not ... and when you write yourself you can understand if what you are writing is also logical ... So it's not like reading a random text(.)

S5: It's not just making sentences (,) but you also have to think about how to make it into a sort of (,) story (,) and if it makes sense (.)

S5: It might have helped in the sense that when you read other's posts you could see if you can understand them properly (,) /.../ you could also notice grammar mistakes in for example other's posts or on the other hand notice something which you should have used yourself ... You needed to look up a lot of words all the time [laughs].

S6: /.../When I read someone's post and saw how they had done it I thought (,) good I can try to do it like that... neatly (.)

S7: The most development was in grammar (,) because after all we were writing in English and we had to make sentences (,) There is grammar in every sentence(,) how to write it and the whole process of construction had to be done with every sentence(,) I felt that my grammar got better (.)

S4: I read other's posts a lot ... how their grammar and spelling was ... I also had to look up a lot of words and phrases (.)

The students regarded blogging to be rather different from other methods of teaching.

Being able to write about any topic of interest was perceived by the students as a positive and even liberating feature of the blog assignments which they did. They felt that in comparison to class work they were not as restricted by time and structure. They did not sense that it was a test of knowledge but rather a way to practise writing on their own. This made it possible for them to think things through and write the post in a way that they wanted it to be. When they had already done some of the posts they were as afraid of

making mistakes anymore because, on the one hand, they knew that the mistakes would not be pointed out publicly and, on the other, they had seen that their peers could understand what they had uploaded. Also, they recognised that blogging offered them the opportunity to express themselves and talk to their peers while learning English.

S1: /.../ the more you broaden your mind (,) the more you know how to use certain words and phrases (,) that you might not hear everywhere (,) because you can upload just about anything on your blog (,) depending on what mood you're in (,) in a way you can express yourself and show yourself to others (,) which can be very good (,) /.../ You can write about things in length ... you don't ... in class (,) time is limited (,) but with blogs you can write like three or four pages if you like and no one will say anything [laughs] (,) I think (,) blog entries are better than some kind of a lesson (.)

S2: You can actually write anything that you like (.) For example with our posts you [the teacher] didn't really grade our grammar mistakes (,) we just had to write as well as we could (,) I think it helps a lot (,) /.../ There wasn't as much tension as with like a test (.) You could just write freely and the teacher sees how much I know (,) /.../ it actually helps a lot because you don't have the teachers help you have to do it independently and I think that was very helpful (.)

S4: Well (,) it's like [a method where] you have to do it yourself ... open the internet and search and figure out what to even write about ... I got attention, and the possibility to talk to others which was nice (,) After all it is communicating with each other in English and making these posts (.)

S3: It gave me a different feeling ... I haven't done something like this before (,) it was quite different (,) /.../ there wasn't time involved (,) you could think about what to write without rushing (,) No one is pressuring you [like in classes] do it now, do it now. You can do it yourself at your own pace (.)

S5: You can be unique and do it like you want it to be and structure it and write about what is important to you (.)

A connection to improving computer skills was also made. One of the students noted that blogging helped develop computer skills and using the internet. The other students mentioned that they became more proficient with the specific webpage which they can now use without effort.

S7: You need a computer to use a blog and it teaches you how to use a computer individually (,) so in a way it is learning English and also educating yourself [in general] (.)

S6: /.../ at first it was complicated, at first writing and beginning is always difficult (,) but when I got going found out how to add pictures and how to post my entry then it went well (.)

S4: Well ... with the last one [last assignment] I already knew how to add pictures and videos correctly (.)

The students also perceived an effect on their communicative skills and courage to communicate. The students sensed that the blogs gave them a little more courage to communicate in English. None of them had ever had the opportunity to communicate in English as regularly as during this half-term of blogging. They sensed that it was good that the other members of the blog were their peers, who are learning English and have the same insecurities because this gave them the chance to learn from each other. However, they also imagined that it would be very interesting and challenging to write in a blog with actual English speakers as members.

While online communication does not seem frightening to them anymore, many still imagine that they would lack enough language skill and courage to comfortably communicate in a real life situation with English speakers.

S1: I think if I had to speak to a native speaker I wouldn't quite dare to speak that much(.) I know that feeling (.) But umm... I think on the internet (,) like on Facebook or on a chat room (,) there I would dare to talk and this helped me /.../

S2:/.../ I still don't dare to talk it [English] yet (,) because I can't pronounce well (,) but if I really had to I would probably manage (.)/.../ with blogs it gives you time to think and you make less mistakes (.)

S3:/.../ Blogging gives you a little bit of courage (,) because when you are in class you don't dare to talk like that (.)

S6:It helped [courage to use English] (,) because you know you have written it [your post] correctly(,) when you got comments and then you would comment yourself(,) You are bolder ... it makes you bolder I think (.)

S7:/.../ I may even have the courage to speak in a foreign language (,) but the problem is (,) if what I say is said correctly (,) even though I like to check before I communicate [written communication] (,) and I try to use better grammar (,) but I think every assignment is in some way useful and also helps communicative skills (.)

As briefly mentioned previously, the first blog entry seemed to be the most difficult for the students. They were confused about what to write and whether or not their post would even be understandable to the others. They also worried about the number of mistakes they would make. After the first post was uploaded, the students were relieved but also excited. Still, the worries did not go away right after posting. This was probably the moment when the tension was the highest, but at the same time it was also the most exciting part of the blogging experience.

S1: *Then [after the first post got uploaded] it was like huh [breaths out] voilà, done. Quickly turned off the computer and went out (.) I think the first one was the most difficult (.)*

S6: *[starts laughing] I felt scared because I doubted if everything is correct and I thought about what others might comment and if they even understand my post (.)*

S5: */.../ after I had uploaded my first post I immediately called S6 and asked if my post is visible [laughs](.)*

When they compared the first post to the last one, most of the students emphasised that making an entry got easier the more they had done it. Students mentioned feeling more confident and better organised while making a post.

S1: *It [completing the assignments] got easier. The first blog entry was difficult (,) I thought will I ever get it done or not (,) but well the more we did (,) the more you start writing and get used to it (.) When the last one was done I was so glad I could have done three more posts right away (.) [laughs]*

S5: *Making the last blog entry I felt more secure and it was easier to write and to think of what to write (.)*

S6: *The last post I wrote straight into the upload box (.) I was more confident and I didn't worry about whether I have made mistakes as much (.)*

S2: *The first one was much more difficult than the last (.) In the last one everything seemed more logical [the process of completing the task] (.) /.../ the text [in the last post] wasn't as long but still it was somehow easier to form a sentence and I didn't even use a dictionary (.)*

S7: *When I finished the last post I thought we should do this more (,) because it was an interesting assignment and it was educating (.)*

Still, one of the students observed that the blog got more complicated to operate when more posts had been uploaded. This was confusing to him.

S3: *I think the first one was cool to write (,) because then everything was new and everyone would comment on all the posts and look at all the posts (,) but with the last one things got complicated because the webpage was full of information and you couldn't find anything anymore ... that was a bit bad (,) but otherwise it was good (.)*

3.2.3 How the students felt about feedback and the teacher's role

The assignments the students were given did not specify that the students should give each other feedback about grammar, spelling and sentences structure. At the same time, it was not forbidden either. Still, the students comments were all related to the content of the posts. When asked what sort of feedback they expected from their peers, most of them preferred to be asked questions. This would make it possible to have a conversation which would be interesting and educating.

S3: *Well (,) I wanted them to comment (,) so it would be more interesting and things would get going (,) so that it wouldn't be just like you writing and no one comments on your post (.)*

S4: *I was looking forward to questions(,) so that I could answer them(.)*

The students asked specifying questions from each other and also gave feedback, which was mostly positive. They were very supportive of each other, praising each other's posts and sharing their own experiences related to the topic. Some of the students found it surprising at first and said that this is not the way they communicate in a real life situation. They found that they normally do not ask each other as many questions. In the blog it came naturally. All of the students found it positive that the others commented on their posts.

S7: *The feedback was very positive (.) Everyone liked the posts and I enjoyed reading other's posts and comments (.)*

Five of the students mentioned that finding out things about the other group members was enjoyable. They found it to be interesting and encouraging and it strengthened the friendship of the group. This gave them positive emotions and the sense of being an important member of the group.

S2: */.../ I now know more about the others (.) also I saw how well they write in English (.)*

S3: *It was very interesting the others like ... it was very different (,) on other sites no one comments like this (,) asks questions I mean (.) /.../ I know what other's hobbies are and what they do (,) I might have never known somethings otherwise (.)*

S4: *I saw that others were interested and read my posts /.../ S2 came to me one time and told me that I have such a good and long post and said hers seemed so short in comparison [laughs](.)*

S7: *Actually I think it was good (,) because I could see that they had read my post and asked questions about it (.) I got to know interesting things about others and got to know my group members more(.) It made me feel good (.)*

S6: *I was happy with the feedback I got (.) They wrote things like your story is nice or cool (.) It encouraged me (.)*

The students mostly did not determine any negative effects from the fact that their peers would be able to see their posts.

S2: *It didn't change anything. I would have made the same kind of post in any case (.)*

Some students mentioned that it was positive because it motivated them to be more thorough in their posts. Some students noted that they made some minor adjustments in

their posts because of this. They concluded that they had to really focus in order to make an enjoyable and understandable post.

S5: It was motivating. Because of this I left out some sentences that were long and dragging (.)

S4: I tried to write more clearly and not to make so many mistakes (.)

S7: /.../ I knew it had to be more interesting and because I knew that other students and the teacher were going to read it I tried to make a ... good post (.)

From the teacher, the students mostly expected feedback about their grammar. They indicated that knowing what their mistakes were would be most beneficial for them. They considered content-related feedback as a medium for having conversations and practising but form-related feedback as an opportunity to actually learn the language more thoroughly. Despite this, one of them remarked that she was equally looking forward to both grammar- and content-related feedback. For this student (S2), they were of equal importance because she saw learning opportunities in both types of feedback.

S2: I think I both [grammar and content feedback] because that way there was a possibility for conversation in the comments (,) and there I could try to use English more/.../

S3: Grammar the most (,) I don't want to make as many mistakes anymore (.)

S7: Definitely grammar (,) because then we know what our mistakes are and we can try to learn from them (,) Content wise I think it's just up to the students what they choose to write about (.)

S1: It think mostly grammar (,) to see what mistakes I've made and try to fix them somehow ... I don't know how [laughs](.)

When the students got feedback from the teacher on the grammar, spelling and sentences structure of their posts and comments, most of the students said that it did not seem as bad as they thought it would be. Nevertheless, one of the students said that he had made more mistakes than he had hoped.

S4: Terrible, should be a lot better (.)

S2: I thought it would be much worse, it actually makes me feel good, it isn't as red as I thought it would be (.)

S7: I think it's cool that I got to know what my mistakes are and I'll try to look them through and somehow(,) learn not to make them again (.)

Most of the students thought that the teacher should be an active member of the blog, posting and commenting just as the students do. These students found it encouraging and considered the examples uploaded by the teacher to be helpful. They could see what the

teacher was expecting from them by reading the example presented by the teacher. Moreover, the teacher's posts were a part of the blog just like the posts uploaded by the students. They could ask the teacher questions and have a conversation just as they did with their peers. This was something new to the students as such an amount of individual attention is not common in the classroom situation. Receiving comments by the teacher was surprising for some students, but they were reassured by them.

S7:/.../ I think it was very positive that you [the teacher] put up an example post because then we students could see how we should do this assignment and umm ... if someone didn't understand exactly what they had to do this helped a lot(,) even I looked at how you had done your post and structured it and it helped me /.../ of course it's nice when the teacher reads my post and the other students as well (,) and because there was a grade at stake I think it affected us even more /.../ I think it supported me (,) because there were no negative comments (,) even when there were mistakes ... and there definitely were some (,) than you didn't criticise (,) but tried to ask a question and then we tried to answer/.../

S4: The teacher's blog posts supported me (,) I got new ideas from them (.)

S2: I think it was good that the teacher was active (.) There was a sort of communication then with the teacher and it helped (.)/.../ The comments from the teacher gave me courage to write more freely (,) and then well (,) the posts too (,) showed that I can write about almost anything and also I could see some grammar there and stuff /.../ It was very surprising at first when the teacher commented (,) that kind of communication out of school with a teacher (,) but it was good (.)

S6: Maybe the comments (,) when the teacher commented (,) then you knew that ... well you had written on topic [laughs] (.)

Still, one of the students thought that it was better when the teacher was more passive, so as to give students more opportunity to think for themselves. In S1's view the students should be the ones active in the blog and also responsible for the blog as this would offer them more opportunity to be independent and responsible for their learning process.

S1: Passive was better (,) I think(,) because ...umm with the first post(,) I got some ideas from that and I could see sentence structure and I could cheat from that(,) but when there was no example I had to make things up myself(.)

3.2.4 How the students feel the blogs could be improved

The students also mentioned some problems that could occur with the blogs. The main issues that the students saw with this type of assignment were computer skills. If a student is too insecure about using the computer, they might find it difficult to adjust to this kind of

a method. It was surprising to find out that students saw this as a problem, despite the fact that they all say that they use the internet every day.

Another thing which was pointed out by the students is the necessity to have a computer and internet connection at home in order to be able to complete the tasks. Although a great majority of people already have the possibility to use internet at home, there can still be complications with it.

One of the students also mentioned that it takes a lot of time and uploading more frequently could get complicated. The most important thing for the students seemed to be their own effort.

All of the students proposed that the effectiveness of the blog depends mostly on how seriously the students take the assignments and how much effort they put in them.

S7: I think it's effective (,) of course not for everyday use (,) but just for doing some assignments (,) like we did /.../ it all depends on how well it's dealt with (.) It is up to the students and it depends on how important it is to them (.)

S1: It won't work when you don't take it seriously and you think that you just have to do it quickly and upload randomly and it's not a big deal/.../

The students also gave some advice about what they thought would make the blogs more effective. The advice that they gave consisted mostly of discussion about what the blogging tasks should not be like. They also suggested that the webpage on which the blog is on should be easy to operate.

S2: The assignments shouldn't be too long and strict (,) there should be more freedom in what you write (,) so that it'll be more interesting (.)/.../ It would be good if the blog website was easy to operate (,) so you'd find all posts and comments easily (.)

S5: It wouldn't work if very long posts were obligatory (,) and also if the topics would have nothing to do with everyday life (.)

S1: It should be done more often in different subjects and with different topics (.)

S7: There should be more people in the blog (,) it would be interesting to talk to more people and read their posts (.) It was a good blog (.)

3.2.5 My perceptions as a teacher

Overall, I perceive this experience as very positive because I saw how much students gained from it, but at the same time I learned from it as well. Nevertheless I also experienced some negative aspects of using a blog for English language teaching.

The first difficulty was finding a free blog webpage which would be easy to use as well as pleasant to look at. The problem was that the blog sites which have more options for structuring and illustrating are usually not free to use. Eventually I decided to use the site www.wordpress.com as it offered the most reasonable opportunities for a free blog.

The second difficulty was time. I noticed very quickly that blogging is a very time consuming method. The teacher who uses blogs will have to spend time thinking through and analysing new assignments, commenting on the students' posts, keeping an eye on the content which is being uploaded and also giving feedback on grammar, spelling and sentence structure. Despite my group being very small, it took me a considerable amount of personal time to administer the blog. Even with only seven students I sometimes found it difficult to keep up with the posts and comments. However, it got a little easier when I was in a more passive role. From this I conclude that in order to be able to communicate with all of the students and give them all proper individual feedback which includes many aspects, it would be wise not to use a blog with large groups. Also, if the group is very independent, the teacher could decide to give more responsibilities to the students themselves.

Despite the difficulties, it was definitely an educating experience. During this time I was very pleasantly surprised by my students, who often struggle to communicate in their lessons and generally give up before they have even started trying. To see them in a different environment, trying their best to be understood and convey meaning and succeed was in many ways an awakening experience. I could see that the more they completed the assignments, the more daring, and creative and active they became. Their development is even visible in the lessons. They are stronger as a group and hence they are not as afraid to express their opinion in the lessons anymore.

Through this experience I learned to know them better and I got a far greater overview of their capabilities.

Summary of the results

At first the students were suspicious and worried about failing. Nevertheless, they grew more confident with every assignment and sensed that the assignments got easier the more they had done them. The students thought that the blogging assignments helped their vocabulary development the most through their looking up words and trying to use them. Positive effects were also mentioned on the use grammar and sentence structure due to reading the others' and the teachers' posts and comments.

All of the students used translation sites for words and expressions. Some of the students translated the whole text from Estonian into English in the first task, but not in the later tasks. Rough drafts were also used only in the first task.

The students claimed that the blogging assignments gave them freedom to be creative and made them stronger as a group. There was a positive effect on the courage to communicate in English; however, many still think that they would be afraid to use English in an out-of-school situation.

The students found it important for the blog to be of good quality and with a understandable structure. Most of the students suggested that the teacher should be an active participant in the blog and considered it helpful and motivating. One of the students feared that the teacher being active makes it too easy for the students as they can copy the structure and ideas from the teacher's post.

The students found content related feedback from their peers interesting and fun. They expected to receive feedback on their grammar; spelling, and sentence structure the most. The students admitted that the blog works better if the assignments have open topics with the possibility of interpretation. They also admitted that the usefulness of the blogging assignments is crucially dependent on the students' own inner motivation.

For the teacher using blogs is a time-consuming method. Nevertheless, it is a very useful method that offers many possibilities. It makes the relationship between the group and the teacher stronger and gives the teacher an overview of the students' capabilities.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results of this survey confirm that the students have a positive attitude towards using blogs in language learning. This result is consistent with previous research (Noytim, 2010; Foroutan, Noordin, and Hamazah 201, see p. 16). Despite being uncertain at first, most emotions that the students got from this experience were positive. Each of them concluded that they gained from these tasks in various ways, which clearly shows the value of blogging as a method of teaching.

The effects on both reading and writing were perceived by the students in various ways. Most of these students do not use English outside the classroom and this gave them the opportunity to do so. They saw that they can use English in a way that is understandable to others. They noticed the others' grammar and sentence structure and even mistakes while reading. Making comments and asking additional questions meant that they had to understand and analyse what their peers were writing about. Also, it was visible in their posts that they got better at organising and structuring their work as well as using the blog itself. This is consistent with findings about the mechanics and organisation of writing by Sun (2010) (see p. 15). The posts did not necessarily get longer but the attempted grammar got more complex. Also, the frequency of uploading and commenting changed as it did not take as much time with the second and the first task as it had done with the third.

Many of them perceived gaining experience in the technical side of using blogs as they could be part of online content creation. It was surprising that the students saw computer skills as a possible obstacle for blogging as a teaching method. Still, this could be explained by the fact that despite using the internet every day, the students often use it in a very limited way. Their use of the internet might often be restricted to social media and websites connected to hobbies and interests. This shows how important developing digital competence really is. With blogging they could practise using the internet to find illustrative and helpful links to help them upload their content and widen their constructive

use of the internet. From this it can be deduced that there was a positive effect on their digital competence (The National Curriculum, see p. 5).

In the interviews the students did not focus on writing in general but separate components of it. The most emphasised effect discussed by the students was on vocabulary development, which is very easy to explain. As previously mentioned, the group has difficulties with English and they also lack proper gymnasium level vocabulary. In order to elaborate on topics which they find interesting and make their message understandable to the others, it was necessary for the students to look up and use vocabulary which they had likely not come across or remembered thus far. It is also very interesting how the students described the process of making a blog entry to explain what they had learned. This shows that the students are capable of recognising the learning curve in the process. From this, it is obvious how valuable the learners own opinions about teaching methods are.

The students saw the communicative nature of blogging through the feedback which they received from their peers. Overall, there was a positive attitude towards the feedback they received from their fellow students. This is consistent with Vurdien (1011), Grami (2012) and Chen (2012) who studied peer feedback (see p. 17). The students considered it interesting and fun to comment on the others' posts and receive comments from the others, because the conversation taking place in the blog was different from usual everyday conversation. This offered them the opportunity to get to know each other better and become stronger as a group. As a teacher, I also witnessed a change in the way they behave in lessons. They express their thoughts and use English more daringly because they are not as afraid of making mistakes as they were before. This, however, makes it possible to correct the mistakes and offers the opportunity to learn from them. Commenting on each other and sparking conversations is definitely one very important part of blogging as its basis is communication.

In previous research the teacher's role has been an issue because the results about it have varied (Mompean 2010; Hasemil and Najafi 2011, see p. 10). Unfortunately, this study does not bring much clarity into this topic. While most of the students found that the teacher should be an active participant in the blog, one of them found that this makes it too easy for the students. This student thought that the learners themselves should be more active because they are the ones who are learning and the teacher should be passive and not interfere. On the other hand, the result did show that the students are very interested in feedback on their grammar, sentence structure and spelling. This, of course, can be dependent on the specific group. These students, who are very worried about their language skill, also considered form-related feedback to be more important than content-related feedback. They consider this to the part in which they are lacking the most.

My perception of the teacher's role in a blog is that (s)he is the chooser and decision maker. However, this is very much dependent on the group. The decision about using blogs has to be based on the group itself and for this the teacher has to know the needs and capabilities of their students. The teacher has to decide whether or not it would be helpful to use blogging with this particular group and if so, how the blog should be organised in order to be of optimal usefulness. The teacher should know what they are trying to teach the students by choosing this method. I hoped to widen the students' general vocabulary and strength their grammar by making them communicate through writing, but above all I wanted to give them the courage to use English despite their level of language skill. Taking into account the students' thoughts revealed in the interviews, I can say that I have succeeded in my goal. Teaching any subject is not just about the practical and necessary lesson related features. Teachers do not just teach their subject but also the competences and values that are in the National Curriculum. It is important to find methods of teaching which integrate more than just one specific skill. The finer details about how a teacher

wants to use blogging as a method of language teaching are up to the teacher to decide and test. On the one hand, with a stronger, more independent group the teacher might decide to be passive and let the students have the responsibility of administrating the blog and giving feedback. On the other hand, with a group which needs more attention, the teacher could take more responsibility for the content and development of the blog.

In conclusion, previous research about using blogs in EFL studies and this research have shown many similar results. Blogging can be used as a method to achieve the outcomes set in the National Curriculum of the gymnasium level about both digital competence as well as language level requirements brought out in the foreign language guide for teachers of English (*valdkonnaraamat*) in the gymnasium level. The students had valuable insights to share about the positive effects on their grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure as well as communicating skills and the overall relationship of the group. The teacher has to make important decisions about whether and how to use a blog as well as how much independence the students have in this process.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to study how students feel about and perceive the use of blogs in language learning. The students completed blogging tasks and were later interviewed about their experiences.

In the introduction of this thesis the importance of technology in children's everyday lives is discussed and connected to its necessity in education. In a society, technology is an enormous part of people's everyday lives it is essential to find ways to integrate it into education. The introduction also gave an overview of digital competence which is discussed in the National Curriculum of the gymnasium level. Blogging, which has been mentioned as a possible method in the National Curriculum of the gymnasium level, is one of the possible ways to use technology for teaching because blogs are easy to use and the content is entirely up to the creators. The introduction gave a short overview of blogging related research which has been done in Estonia.

The first chapter an overview of the role of writing in EFL classes and how it is describe in the Estonian National Curriculum of the gymnasium level. It was also discussed how blogging could be used to teach writing were given. It was argued that despite blogging being informal writing; it still has positive effects on students' writing skills. The first chapter also included previous research about students' perceptions and attitudes towards blogging in EFL classes. The chapter was concluded with a discussion of the teachers' role in the process of blogging as a method of teaching.

The second chapter gave an overview of the methodology, sample, measurement and procedure of the study of the students' perceptions about and attitudes towards blogging. The method of blogging was tested on a group of seven EFL students. During one half-term the students had to upload three blog posts as assignments and comment on each other's posts. Their experiences were investigated through semi-structured interviews. The answers of the interviews were coded and categorised by the main themes which occurred.

The results of the interviews were reviewed in the third chapter. The students perceived that blogging helped them to develop better vocabulary and pay attention to grammar and sentence structure in a way that is different from an everyday classroom context. They had the chance to communicate in English and because of this also grew stronger as a group. They enjoyed getting feedback from their peers through comments. They also admitted that the amount of effort which they put into their blog posts and comments is what matters the most if they want this method to be effective. Most of the students suggested that the teacher should be an active part of the blog, posting and commenting just as they do. However one of the students disagreed about this saying that it makes the assignments too easy and limits the students' independence. From the teacher the students mostly expected form related feedback. For the teacher using a blog is not very easy as it is very time consuming. If a teacher wants to be an active part of the blog (s)he has to keep an eye on all of the posts and comments. Teacher should also provide feedback about form as the students thought it to be most important. This is why the method of blogging would probably not be as effective with very large groups. However, the communicative nature of blogging makes it an educational and interesting experience for both the students and the teacher.

Although this study revealed that the students have a positive impression of blogging in EFL classes, further study with bigger groups and/or groups of different language levels would give more insight into this topic. Further research about the teacher's role in the blog as well as the optimal assignments and group size should be made in order to get an even clearer picture of the possibilities of blogs in English language learning.

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Appendix 1

Interview questions (the order and wording of the questions might be changed during the interview according to the flow of the conversation)

1. Have you ever been part of a blog, whether in your free time or in connection to a project or subject? What kind of blog?
2. What did you feel when the teacher first said that we were going to have a blog in our English studies?
3. How can blogging affect language learning?
 - 3.1 How can it help/hinder?
4. How did you do your blog entries?
 - 4.1 What were the things that you feel you did well?
 - 4.2 What were the things you could have done better/differently?
5. Describe what changed in you during the period of uploading posts?
6. How is blogging different from other methods? If it isn't, why not?
7. How do you evaluate blogging as a method of teaching?
8. What did you feel right after you had uploaded your first blog entry?
9. How do you feel now that you've uploaded your last blog entry?
10. How did your attitude towards blogging change? (Did it change at all?)
11. What kinds of effects did blogging have on your language skills (reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure) Did it have any effects, if not than why do you think it didn't affect your skills?
12. How do you evaluate your development in these categories if you compare your first entry and your last: reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure?
13. How does blogging help the courage to communicate and communication skills? If it doesn't then what do you think is the issue?
14. How do you evaluate the development your courage to communicate and communication skills if you compare your first entry to your last?
15. What kind of role should the teacher have in the blog? Why?

16. How did the teacher support/hinder the process of writing and uploading your blog entries?
17. How did you feel when you got comments from the teacher?
18. How did you feel when you got feedback about form related mistakes from the teacher?
19. What kind of feedback were you looking forward to the most?
20. Could school subject related blogging work without the students getting a mark for their assignments? How?
21. Would you be willing to continue using blogs in your EFL studies?
22. Did you feel affected by the fact that all of the group members including the teacher could read your posts and comments?
23. If yes, how did it affect you?
24. How did you feel when you got comments from your group members?
25. What kind of feedback did you hope to receive from your group members?

Appendix 2

Assignment I

The first topic is travelling.

ASSIGNMENT: Write about a trip you've made **OR** Write about a trip you would like to make (the ideal place to go)

The content is up for you to decide. You can write as much as you like, but try to cover the topic you've chosen. Write about time, travelling companions, activities, your opinion or any other idea that comes into your mind and would be interesting for the others' to read and find out about. It's also a good idea to add pictures, videos etc. to your blog entry in order to illustrate it.

NB! Keep an eye on the blog; you can start commenting on others' posts as soon as they have been uploaded.

Assignment II

The second topic is interests and hobbies

ASSIGNMENT: Write about something you enjoy doing. It can be a hobby or just an interest of yours.

The content is up for you to decide. You can write as much as you like, but try to cover the topic you've chosen. Write about activities, movies, games, shows, sports or any other idea that comes into your mind and would be interesting for the others' to read and find out about. It's also a good idea to add pictures, videos etc. to your blog entry in order to illustrate it.

NB! Keep an eye on the blog; you can start commenting on others' posts as soon as they have been uploaded.

Assignment III

The third topic is truth or lie.

ASSIGNMENT: Write three facts. Two of these facts have to be true and one of them has to be fantasy.

The content is up for you to decide. It's a good idea to write thoroughly to make it a challenge for the others' to guess which of the facts are true and which one is false. It's also a good idea to add pictures, videos etc. to your blog entry in order to illustrate it.

NB! This time you have to guess which one of the facts is wrong so definitely keep an eye on the blog; you can start commenting on others' posts as soon as they have been uploaded.

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

INGLISE FILOLOOGIA OSAKOND

Hele-Mai Kaupmees

Students' perceptions of and attitudes towards using blogging in upper intermediate EFL classes

Õpilaste tajude ja suhtumine blogide kasutamisse gümnaasiumi inglise keele õppes

Magistritöö

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Annotatsioon:

Antud uurimuse eesmärk oli välja selgitada, mida õpilased tunnevad blogide kasutamise suhtes ja kuidas nad seda tajuvad. Selle uurimuse tulemused on kasulikud õpetajatele, kes tahavad integreerida tehnoloogiat oma õppemeetoditesse. Blogide kasutamine pakub õpilastele võimalust klassivälises keskkonnas suhelda võõrkeeles.

Antud teema kohta püstitati neli peamist uurimisküsimust:

1. Kuidas tajuvad õpilased blogide kasutamist inglise keelt võõrkeelena õppimisel?
2. Kuidas suhtuvad õpilased blogide kasutamisse inglise keelt võõrkeelena õppimisel?
3. Kuidas tajuvad õpilased õpetaja rolli ja tagasisidet?
4. Kuidas tajuvad õpilased kaaslaste poolset tagasisidet?

Küsimused on tuletatud varasematest uuringutest (Noytim, 2010; Foroutan, Noordin, Hamazah, 2013; Mompean 2010; Hasemil, Najafi 2011).

Seitse gümnaasiumi õpilast, kes õpivad inglise keelt teise võõrkeelena ning kellel on antud ainega raskusi, olid uuringu valimiks. Blogi eesmärgiks oli panna õpilased inglise keeles suhtlema klassivälises keskkonnas. Õpilased pidid sooritama kolm avatud teemaga ülesannet ning andma teinteisele tagasisidet kommentaaride näol. Õpilased hiljem intervjueriti ning tulemused traskribeeriti ja kategoriseeriti.

See magistritöö on jagatud kuueks peamiseks osaks. Sissejuhatuses antakse ülevaade tehnoloogia olulisusest hariduses ja blogimisest õppemeetodina. Esimene peatükk on jagatud viieks: kirjutamise õpetamine inglise keele õppes, kirjutamise õpetamine Eesti õppekava kohaselt, blogide kasutamine kirjutamise õpetamiseks, õpilaste suhtumine ja tajud blogimisse kui õppemeetodisse varasemate uuringute põhjal ja õpetaja roll. Teises ja kolmandas peatükis antakse ülevaade töö metodoloogias ja tulemustest, millele järgnevad arutelu ja kokkuvõte.

Selle uuringu tulemused näitavad, et üldiselt suhtuvad õpilased blogimisse positiivselt. Õpilased tajusid, et see aitas neil arendada sõnavara, lauseehitust ja grammatikat ning pakkus neile eneseväljendus ja suhtlus võimalust. Nad nautisid tagasisidet kaasõpilastelt ja tundsid, et õppisid oma grupi liikmeid paremini tundma. Õpetaja roll on kindlasti teema, mis vajab edasi uurimist, kuid enamuse õpilasi leidis, et õpetaja peaks olema aktiivne blogis osaleja. Õpilased ootasid pigem vormiga kui sisuga seotud tagasisidet.

Märksõnad: bloggimine, bloggimine õppimiseks, inglise keele õppimine, inglise keeles kirjutama õppimine, õpilaste tajud, õpilaste suhtumine, tehnoloogiliste vahendite kasutamine inglise keele tundides.

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